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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001280

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; EUR/ACE; SCA/PPD

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: U.S. EDUCATORS DISCOVER REALITY OF TURKMEN
EDUCATION

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Nine professors and professional educators from different institutions of higher learning in the United States attended the International Education Conference held in Turkmenistan during September 8-10. Several met with Turkmen governmental officials or spoke with their counterparts about education in Turkmenistan. Through their interaction with local educators, the Americans noted severe deficiencies in the curricula, materials, training and standards in the Turkmen education system. END SUMMARY.

AMERICANS COME TO TURKMENISTAN WITH NO USG INVOLVEMENT

12. (C) A group of nine U.S. educators were invited by the Government of Turkmenistan to participate in the recent International Education Conference and Exhibition. Most of the educators were identified through their close contact with the higher education system in Turkey. The Turkish Vice-Rector of the Turkmen-Turkish University had recently visited several of the U.S. universities and personally invited the attendees. Most of the U.S. educators had come with the hope of expanding Turkmen student admission at their schools.

LACK OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

13. (C) Despite the special treatment given to the U.S. professors, they uncovered a reality that starkly contrasted with the conference's lofty goals. Several of the U.S. educators spoke with local educators and reviewed curricula and invariably found it greatly lacking. One professor said he analyzed the university level chemistry curriculum and determined it to be comparable to a junior high curriculum in the U.S. Another said that a university English language teacher was unable to have a simple conversation with a native English speaker.

14. (C) On repeated occasions, the U.S. educators were told by local teachers that there were not enough books or instructional materials for all the students. This was also noted by one observer who said that students appeared to be either unfamiliar with text books or unable to read them. As a recommendation, the U.S. professors suggested an increase in the number of faculty exchange programs. Several were told that some universities were in particular need of English speaking instructors.
TECHNICAL SPECIALISTS LACKING

¶5. (C) A few U.S. professors remarked on the massive construction activity in Ashgabat and found that the engineers and architects were generally foreigners (Turkish or French). The professors expressed a sense from their Turkmen hosts that the Turkmen feel the need to train their own technical workforce rather than provide liberal arts education.

STUDENTS MUST ATTEND CLASSES, BUT THAT DOES NOT FORCE THEM TO PAY ATTENTION

¶6. (C) A recent Junior Faculty Training Program alumni commented that since his return to the Turkmen university system, he has been embarrassed by the inattention of his students. In a culture rife with bribery, the professor commented that while students are required by law to attend lectures, they simply do not pay attention. As he described it, students are reading, listening to music, or sleeping, but are not engaged in learning. (COMMENT: The culture of bribery creates an environment whereby the students pay for a slot at the university and can pay for their degree, so they feel no need to study. END COMMENT.) Interestingly, one government official assured one of the visiting U.S. scholars that the education system in Turkmenistan is free, and places at university are not bought. (COMMENT: Embassy sources say that slots can cost from \$5,000 to \$50,000. We have heard figures as high as \$100,00 quoted for places in the very popular law departments. There are university positions available for only 3% of graduating high school students due to a lack of universities and colleges. END COMMENT)

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

¶7. (C) Several professors commented on the juxtaposition of Turkmen educators, desire to institute computer distance

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learning with the lack of technology, including reliable Internet. One also questioned the actual demand for this method. He said there seemed to be grandiose plans for technology, but little action to realize them. One example was that teachers throughout the country are unwilling to use the new Smart Boards provided in classrooms, because they could lose their jobs if the equipment breaks.

UNQUALIFIED FOR EXCHANGE PROGRAM

¶8. (C) Romanian Ambassador Homula (protect), whose country has a bilateral MOU on education with Turkmenistan, told us that the students in the exchange program are woefully unprepared for university study. Students are recruited exclusively by the Turkmen government for up to 20 slots primarily in oil and gas studies, engineering, and international affairs. The students did not know how to use a textbook, and despite choosing to study engineering or energy studies, they were unable to read a graph or understand basic principles of Algebra, let alone higher math. Homula said his country had been prepared to give the students a preparatory year of language study to learn Romanian before starting university, but not a full high school curriculum. The Romanians are now considering providing technical training in Ashgabat to clear up math and science deficiencies before sending the students to Romania for language training.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: The visit by U.S. educators shone more light on the massive deficiencies in the Turkmen education system. While high-level education officials are pushing for the Internet and Smart Boards, teachers and professors are unfamiliar with textbooks and material. The Niyazov era dealt a vicious blow to Turkmenistan's education system and the current culture of investing in bricks and mortar is doing little to rectify the many underlying substantive weaknesses. END COMMENT.

CURRAN